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THE SEEDS OF EXPLORATION ESSENCE

by Peter Russell, MA, DCS

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The *EXPLORATION ESSENCE* and graduate *EXPLORATION ESSENCE* programs, run by Karen Malik and me, are now in their tenth year. The program's popularity stems from several factors: It is the first TMI program that directly explores spiritual awakening. It was the first TMI program to have an external trainer working alongside a TMI residential facilitator. It was also the first program to integrate meditation practices with Hemi-Sync®.

The seeds of *EXPLORATION ESSENCE* go back a long way. In the 1980s, Bob Monroe came across my video, *The Global Brain*, and began including it in some of his programs. Around the same time, I had become intrigued by Hemi-Sync and had been listening to some of the early tapes. Bob and I exchanged several letters (this was long before email), and he extended an open invitation for me to come and present at TMI. But, sadly, he passed away before I was able to get there. Laurie Monroe took over the reins, and, following up on Bob's interest, invited me to present at one of the then-annual professional seminars in the mid-1990s. During that visit she asked if I would be interested in conducting a program that integrated my own work with that of TMI. The development of non-ordinary states of consciousness had been an interest of mine since my college days, and had been a central part of my own work with meditation. I saw Hemi-Sync as a natural complement to my approach, and so was definitely interested, but at that time was not sure how to incorporate my work within a TMI framework.

Soon after Laurie's invitation, Karen Malik attended a local group I was running on the topic of consciousness. Many of you know Karen as one of the longest-serving TMI trainers; she worked closely with Bob in the very early days of the institute, running the first 10-day public programs. At the end of the program, Karen asked me, "Why don't you and I do a program together at TMI?"

And so, with Laurie's blessing, *EXPLORATION ESSENCE* was born.

The Nature of Essence

The word “Essence” in the title refers to our own inner essence. Some teachings call this “True Nature,” others the “True Self,” “Pure Consciousness,” “Spirit,” or, simply, “Being.” Whatever term they may use, they are all pointing to an unchanging quality of consciousness that lies behind our everyday experience. However, our true nature is not usually noticed because it is overshadowed by the many thoughts, feelings, images, sensory perceptions, and personality patterns that occupy our attention. To discover our essence, we must step behind the active thinking mind, behind our various personality patterns, to the core of our being. Spiritual teachers throughout the ages have repeatedly claimed that when we do open our awareness to this underlying ground of our own being, we discover a deep ease and inner freedom. We realize that this is what we have been seeking all along, but we have been looking for it outside ourselves, where only transitory pleasures exist, rather than looking within, to the core of our being.

My own path to exploring essence had been through meditation and Indian philosophy. Karen had been exploring essence through the teachings of A.H. Almaas and his Diamond Heart approach. Almaas integrated the wisdom of various spiritual teachings and developed a profound understanding of the human mind, especially the ways in which we get ourselves trapped, and the practices that can help us find inner freedom by bringing together each of our lifetime’s research in these fields and combining them with Hemi-Sync, we saw the possibility of a radically different TMI program that would take participants into the area of spiritual awakening.

Bob Monroe was very much against his work being associated with anything “spiritual”—an attitude with which I fully empathize. In the 1970s I had been teaching meditation to corporate executives in Europe. They were interested in the health benefits of meditation and how it could help alleviate stress; they would have run a mile at the mention of anything that sounded spiritual. Indeed, one company made me promise never to tell anyone that I was teaching them to meditate. Likewise, Bob wanted his work to be accepted by the mainstream and quite rightly knew that any association with spirituality would have turned many people off. But times had changed since those pioneering days. Today, seeking a richer spiritual life has become respectable, corporations are proud to announce they had meditation rooms, and Time magazine has run cover stories on the subject. Karen felt that the time was right to take the institute in this direction, and so we created a more spiritually oriented program, one that takes participants deep into an exploration of their true nature.

A Unique Approach

One of the unique aspects of *EXPLORATION ESSENCE* is the live Hemi-Sync sessions. We do use pre-recorded “tapes” at the start of the week in order to review the various focus levels, but from then on all the Hemi-Sync sessions are live, with either Karen or me guiding the process. Being “live” allows us to design exercises that directly connect participants with the

qualities of their inner essence, and open them to a fuller awareness of their true nature. In addition to the live Hemi-Sync sessions, we also include meditation instruction as an integral aspect of the program. Meditation need not be difficult or mysterious. It is basically the skill of allowing the thinking mind to become quiet, so that we can become more aware of the present moment. It is in the present moment that we begin to connect with our essence.

As the week progresses and participants deepen their connection with essence, we begin to explore such questions as: What is it like to live more in the present moment? How can we listen better to the still quiet voice within? What helps open our hearts to the love and wisdom they hold? And how, by learning to recognize the qualities of essence, can we live more fulfilling and caring lives? In Karen's words,

"We notice a softening and quieting of the group. As the authentic qualities of essence emerge—qualities such as joy, strength, confidence, kindness, compassion, and inner wisdom—it can be palpable and contagious... fun and powerful. When people interact from a more genuine and authentic place in themselves, the group comes together at a soul level and that is very sweet. People become less invested in images of themselves, more authentic, more in touch with what is real for them."

This is born out by the feedback from participants. One participant commented that, "It has brought my life together, bringing spirituality into my experience." Another remarked that, "It has transformed my life, and the changes have stayed with me throughout the year." A third said that, "I had a sense of calm and grounding, a stronger sense of inner strength, confidence, and peace."

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